

# Missouri

## Agriculture Prevailing Wage Survey



# 2019

## Introduction

The Missouri Prevailing Wage Agriculture Survey was conducted by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development's research arm, the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC), in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Foreign Labor Certification. The purpose of this survey was to gather data to determine the 2018 prevailing wage paid to temporary workers in Missouri for different crops or livestock. This data will assist in implementing the federal H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program by determining prevailing wage rates in the agriculture sector and ensuring that both U.S. and foreign workers receive equal pay.

This survey provides wage information for temporary migrant and/or seasonal agriculture workers based on input from agriculture operators across the state.

## About the H-2A Prevailing Wage

For purposes of foreign labor certification, a prevailing wage is defined as the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in the requested occupation in the area of intended employment. Agricultural employers who anticipate a shortage of U.S. workers may file an application requesting temporary foreign agricultural labor certification. In order to establish the prevailing wage rate surveys are conducted for each agricultural crop activity in which certification is sought.

The H-2A program permits agricultural employers to apply for foreign workers (guest workers) to perform farm work of a seasonal or temporary nature. The H-2A program is designed to ensure employers a legal and adequate labor force while protecting the jobs and wages of U.S. workers.

## Survey Method

Around 3,700 agricultural operators in Missouri were sent the voluntary wage survey during March of 2019. Due to the lack of an existing comprehensive database covering agricultural businesses, MERIC created a custom database using the following resources:

- Previous agricultural surveys
- The Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) database for Quarter 2 of 2017
- Employer data in the MERIC Workforce Information Database (ReferenceUSA 2017)
- Previous H-2A applications

A mail survey was sent to agriculture businesses during the month of March. Each establishment surveyed had the option of returning the completed form in a postal paid envelope or completing it online at a designated internet site. Some recipients, per request, were sent the link to the electronic survey by email and received no paper survey. Duplicate records in the data sources had been identified and deleted to ensure that agriculture businesses received only one survey.

## Disclosure

Due to the Federal Privacy Act, releasing any data which would divulge information that relates to any identifiable person, business or organization without the prior knowledge or written consent of that person, business or organization is prohibited by law. Various confidentiality rules are applied to all data that are released or published to prevent the publication or disclosure of any information deemed confidential.

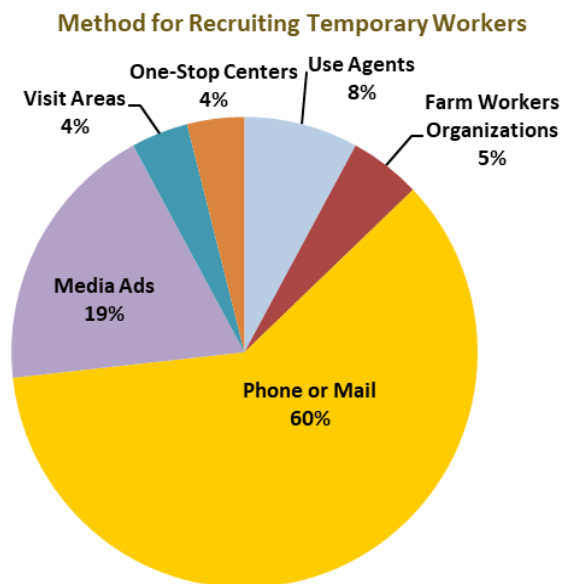
## Survey Results

As of the end of May, MERIC received 662 completed surveys out of the 3,714 questionnaires mailed to agricultural operators in the state. The response rate of completed surveys to mailed surveys is 17.8 percent.

From the completed survey results, 106 agricultural operators reported employing temporary migrant or seasonal farm workers and 13 of those said they participated in the H-2A Prevailing Wage Program.

## Recruiting Workers

Missouri farmers report that they recruit their temporary workers in several ways. Around sixty percent (60.4%) of the farmers reported they contact former workers by phone or mail to recruit them. Nearly nineteen percent (18.8%) recruit by placing ads in newspapers, etc. Nearly eight percent (7.9%) recruit by placing ads in newspapers, etc. Nearly eight percent (7.9%) of Missouri farmers used Agents to recruit workers and five percent (5.0%) used farm workers organizations. Recruiting from One-Stop centers and visiting the area where workers live are each used by four percent (4.0%) of farmers.





## Temporary Workers by Crop

Survey respondents recorded the most temporary workers in the production of soybeans, bedding plants, and corn. Cotton and apples round out the top five. Missouri farmers hire temporary workers for over forty different crops and livestock jobs.

| Crop           | Temporary Workers | Crop           | Temporary Workers |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Soybeans       | 82                | Hay Harvest    | 28                |
| Bedding Plants | 77                | Peaches        | 23                |
| Corn           | 76                | Wheat          | 22                |
| Cotton         | 61                | Watermelons    | 20                |
| Apples         | 41                | Cattle         | 16                |
| Multiple Crops | 36                | Trees          | 16                |
| Pumpkins       | 33                | Vegetables     | 16                |
| Construction   | 30                | Nursery Plants | 15                |

## Salaries Paid

Most Missouri temporary agriculture workers are paid by the hour for their work. The amount of money the workers are paid depends on the type of crop or livestock they are tending. Below are some of the lowest and highest average hourly rates.\*

| Lowest Rate Per Hour per Crop/Livestock |        |
|---|--------|
| Grapes                                  | \$7.73 |
| Christmas Tree                          | \$7.85 |
| Sheep                                   | \$9.00 |
| Apples                                  | \$9.51 |
| Tomatoes                                | \$9.83 |
| Cotton                                  | \$9.90 |

| Highest Rate Per Hour per Crop/Livestock |         |
|--|---------|
| Pecans                                   | \$15.00 |
| Watermelons                              | \$15.00 |
| Swine                                    | \$14.00 |
| Grain                                    | \$13.75 |
| Construction                             | \$13.59 |
| Cattle                                   | \$13.35 |

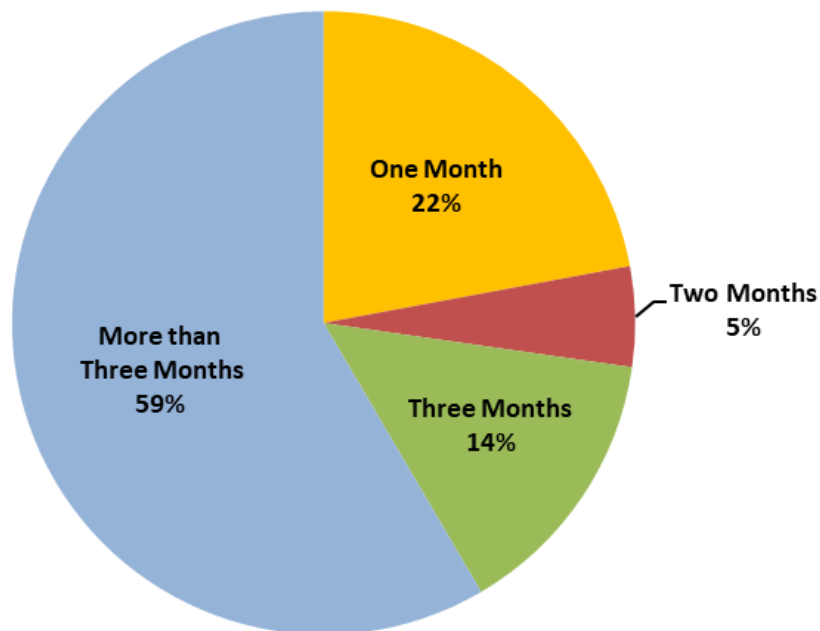
\*weighted average wages

Temporary farm workers are not always paid an hourly salary. The type of crop or livestock and the employer may affect the method that workers are paid. For example, Apples can be paid by the bushel or bin and Flowers by the flat.

### Tools and Equipment and Occupational Qualifications

Most agriculture employers (79.3%) who hire temporary workers provide tools, supplies, and equipment. Nearly one quarter (22.1%) of employers require one month of agriculture work experience, and almost sixty percent (58.4%) require more than three months of agriculture work experience. Sixty-six percent (65.8%) of employers require that the seasonal workers be able to operate farm equipment.

Required Agriculture Work Experience



### Housing

Only eighteen employers (17%) who hired temporary laborers provided some type of housing for their workers. Nine employers provided housing for single workers. Six provided for both single and family housing. Two employer provided family housing only. (One respondent did not specify the type of housing provided.) From those employers who provided housing, two charged their employees for utilities, and another required a rent and utilities. Six provided housing at no charge.

### Transportation

Since many of the temporary farm workers do not live close to their employer, transportation may be another benefit paid to the employees. From those responding to the survey, ten employers reported providing transportation benefits to their workers. Six provided a reimbursement for travel costs, one of whom also provided a gas allowance, three provided an airline ticket and one provided a bus ticket.

## Appendix A – Rates of Pay

The average rate of pay reflects what a worker in a crop is likely to be paid. The average wage is weighted by the number of workers paid a given wage for a crop as reported by farm employers.\*

\*excludes respondent who reported wages but not the number of workers employed

| Crop/Livestock      | Number Employed | Average Rate of Pay | Type of Pay |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Apples              | 41              | \$9.51              | Per Hour    |
| Asparagus           | 13              | \$10.50             | Per Hour    |
| Bedding Plants      | 77              | \$10.83             | Per Hour    |
| Berries             | 12              | \$12.75             | Per Hour    |
| Cabbage             | 10              | \$10.00             | Per Hour    |
| Cattle              | 16              | \$13.35             | Per Hour    |
| Christmas Trees     | 10              | \$7.85              | Per Hour    |
| Construction, Farm  | 30              | \$13.59             | Per Hour    |
| Corn                | 72              | \$13.08             | Per Hour    |
| Cotton              | 41              | \$9.85              | Per Hour    |
| Crops (Unspecified) | 33              | \$11.30             | Per Hour    |
| Dogs                | 4               | \$12.00             | Per Hour    |
| Elderberries        | 6               | \$12.00             | Per Hour    |
| Elderberries        | 4               | \$1.00              | Per Pound   |
| Fish                | 2               | \$12.58             | Per Hour    |
| Flowers             | 2               | \$10.00             | Per Hour    |
| Grain               | 7               | \$13.25             | Per Hour    |
| Grapes              | 8               | \$7.73              | Per Hour    |
| Green Beans         | 3               | \$13.34             | Per Hour    |
| Hay Harvest         | 28              | \$11.95             | Per Hour    |
| Horses & Mules      | 2               | \$10.00             | Per Hour    |
| Irises              | 3               | \$10.00             | Per Hour    |
| Livestock           | 10              | \$10.66             | Per Hour    |
| Multiple Crops      | 36              | \$14.00             | Per Hour    |
| Mushrooms           | 3               | \$1.00              | Per Pound   |
| Nursery Plants      | 20              | \$12.81             | Per Hour    |
| Other               | 71              | \$12.47             | Per Hour    |



## Appendix A –Rates of Pay

| Crop/Livestock           | Number Employed | Average Rate of Pay | Type of Pay |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Peaches                  | 23              | \$10.50             | Per Hour    |
| Pecans                   | 2               | \$15.00             | Per Hour    |
| Peonies                  | 2               | \$10.75             | Per Hour    |
| Poultry                  | 2               | \$12.50             | Per Hour    |
| Pumpkins                 | 3               | \$7.85              | Per Hour    |
| Pumpkins                 | 30              | \$12.00             | Per Bin     |
| Rice                     | 12              | \$13.25             | Per Hour    |
| Sheep                    | 2               | \$9.00              | Per Hour    |
| Sod                      | 7               | \$12.63             | Per Hour    |
| Soybeans                 | 78              | \$13.05             | Per Hour    |
| Soybeans                 | 4               | \$60.00             | Per Acre    |
| Swine                    | 10              | \$18.42             | Per Hour    |
| Tobacco                  | 6               | \$10.00             | Per Hour    |
| Tomatoes                 | 12              | \$9.83              | Per Hour    |
| Trees                    | 16              | \$11.57             | Per Hour    |
| Vegetables (Unspecified) | 16              | \$12.29             | Per Hour    |
| Watermelons              | 20              | \$15.00             | Per Hour    |
| Wheat                    | 22              | \$12.77             | Per Hour    |

## Appendix B – Survey Letter

Dear Crop Grower/Livestock Handler:

The Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) is gathering data to determine the agricultural prevailing wage in Missouri.\*\* Prevailing wage rates are used to ensure that farm workers receive equal pay. Completion of the attached survey will ensure the establishment of an accurate wage rate.

The information you supply is **confidential** and protected by the **Federal Privacy Act**. All information will be combined with that of other growers/handlers within Missouri to ensure individually identifiable information is not released. The survey answers should be based on your harvest or production season. If you are not within your harvest/production season, the survey should be completed based upon the last year's season. If you hire temporary workers who work as farm construction laborers (rather than crop workers or livestock tenders), we would appreciate you completing the survey, too.

**Please return the completed survey within 14 days** using the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed or faxing the survey to 573-751-9843. If you would like to complete this survey online, please log on to our website at: <http://www.missourieconomy.org/form.html>. For assistance or additional information about this survey, please contact Bradley Massman, MERIC Prevailing Wage Project Contact, at Bradley.Massman@ded.mo.gov or 573-751-3638.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Alan Spell, MERIC Research Manager

*\*\*MERIC is the research unit for the Missouri Department of Economic Development. This survey is conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor, Division of Foreign Labor Certification.*

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